THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

of

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

in cooperation with

THE DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

presents

Monteverdi's

The Coronation of Poppea

Tuesday and Wednesday,
March 6 and 7, 1973
8:30 p.m.
Convocation Hall, Arts Building

The Coronation of Poppea

an opera in two acts by Claudio Monteverdi
realised by Raymond Leppard

text by Giovanni Busenello
English translation by
Geoffrey Dunn and Humphrey Proctor-Gregg

First performed in Venice in 1642
Premiere of the Leppard realisation given July 29, 1962
by the Glyndebourne Festival Opera

Cast

(in order of appearance)

GODDESS FORTUNE	**Betty Kolodziej**
GODDESS VIRTUE	**Gail Garrison**
AMOR, the God of Love	**Beverley Cohen**
OTTONE, a former lover of Poppea	**Franklyn Giffen**
FIRST SOLDIER	**Nigel Lemon**
SECOND SOLDIER	**George Cotton**
POPPEA	**Iris Fraser**
NERO, Emperor of Rome	**Lary Benson***
ARNALTA, Poppea's nurse	**Andrea Mellis**
OCTAVIA, Empress of Rome	**Jacqueline Preuss**
DRUSILLA, lady-in-waiting to Octavia	**Frances Dietz**
VALETTO, an attendant to Octavia	**Nigel Lemon**
SENECA, counsellor and tutor to Nero	**James Roberts**
PALLAS ATHENE, Goddess of Wisdom	**Susan Goodwin**
LIBERTO, captain of Nero's guard	**George Cotton**
LUCANO, a poet, friend of Nero and nephew of Seneca	**Nigel Lemon**
SERVANT TO POPPEA	**Audrey Olsen**
SERVANT TO NERO	**Katheryne Perri**

Chorus of slaves, senators, noble ladies, soldiers and disciples of Seneca

*Appearing with permission of Actors' Equity

Prologue: In Heaven

Act I: Scene 1—Outside Poppea's house
Scene 2—Inside Poppea's house
Scene 3—In the Emperor's palace
Scene 4—Inside Poppea's house
Scene 5—Outside Poppea's house
Scene 6—In Seneca's garden

Act II: Scene 1—In the Emperor's palace
Scene 2—Inside Poppea's house
Scene 3—Outside Poppea's house
Scene 4—In the Emperor's palace

Rome, A.D. 62: The Gods are disputing between themselves which among them is the most powerful. Amor, the God of Love, maintains that his power alone can change the course of history. The opera sets out to demonstrate this statement.

There will be one 15-minute intermission between the two acts.

Tuesday night's performance marks the Canadian premiere of the Leppard realisation of this opera.

Production Staff

Music Director and Conductor ..... **Alfred Strombergs**
Stage Director ..... **Rowland Holt Wilson**
Designer (sets and properties) ..... **Lee Livingstone**
Lighting Designer ..... **Simon Hargrave**
Chorus Master ..... **David Stocker**
Stage Manager ..... **Malcolm Kibblewhite**
Deputy Stage Manager ..... **Robert Hallam**
Assistant Stage Manager ..... **Barbara Prowse**
Wardrobe Mistress ..... **Vivienne McRoberts**
Assistant Wardrobe Mistress ..... **Betty Kolodziej**
Master Electrician ..... **Gie Roberts**
Assistant Electrician ..... **Clayton Anderson**
Master of Properties ..... **David Speers**
Make-up ..... **Barbara Spreng**
Repetiteurs ..... **Teresa Cotton, Sandra Erdman, Viola Braun-Fox**

Opera Chorus

Sigrid Albert, Nancy Browne, Bonnie-Jean Dobek, Mary McDevitt, Phyllis Moore, Susan Prime, Rita Smyth, Judith Wiens.

Andre Boisvert, Jack Dowling, David Giffen, Jim Higgs, Randy Lecky, Dale McIntosh, Mel Otke, David Rushton, Frank Thede, John van Praag.

(See Inside)

Poppea: The Articulation of Conflict

by

Brian Harris

In 1637, the first public opera theater was opened in Venice. It was called the Teatro San Cassiano, and it was owned by the noble Venetian family, the Tron. The patricians of the city immediately began to compete with one another in the founding of theaters, which were built more because of the rivalry of the leading families than because of the Venetians' clamoring for more shows. Four theaters were in operation by 1641, and by the end of the century, there were sixteen, all owned by noble families who leased boxes in the theaters to the other nobles of Venice. This, in fact, was the principal method of seating in the theaters, which usually had a very small floor area, but many boxes arranged in tiers. For example, the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo, where The Coronation of Poppea was first performed, had twenty-nine boxes in five tiers. Behind each box was a small salon where the quality could socialize and take refreshment in private. These boxes were usually leased for the entire season by the distinguished Venetian families and by the foreign embassies, making the opera houses a center of Venetian social and political activity.

When Monteverdi's Poppea was performed at the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo in 1642, the composer was seventy-five years old, a fact that inevitably invites comparison with the feats of Giuseppe Verdi two centuries later. Although chronologically the work stands at the end of only the first fifty years of opera history, the coordination of that statistic with the artistic achievement of Monteverdi must be more than a matter of mere mathematics. One can with amazement compare Poppea with the earliest works of the Camerata composers around 1600. But perhaps more telling is the juxtaposition of Poppea with Monteverdi's own first opera, L'Orfeo, written for the Gonzaga court in Mantua in 1607. The most impressive conceptual change from L'Orfeo to Poppea is probably to be seen in the libretti and in Monteverdi's treatment of them. The earlier work utilizes the tragic mythological tale of Orpheus and Euridice, set in a pastoral environment with typically classical restraint in its presentation of individual personalities and emotional reactions. The libretto of Poppea, on the other hand, concerns a real event, most of the details of which are a matter of historical record. This fact seems to govern the direction of Francesco Busenello's libretto and Monteverdi's setting of it. The emphasis is appropriately placed on the emotionally-charged personal relationships of the emperor, Nero, and the other courtiers in the Rome of A.D. 62.

It is in this respect that Poppea might well be considered a "modern" opera, in that it places in opposition to one another human forces whose actions are motivated by passion, jealousy and political ambition. Impulsive and determined action mark the principal characters in this opera. And it is the articulation of these qualities that appears to be Monteverdi's main concern.

He brings to bear on this problem all the skill acquired in the preceding sixty years of musical composition. We find his use of the stile recitativo at its most expressive. The "excited style" which he claimed to have invented in 1624 is used to convey the affections of agitation and violence. Full-fledged madrigals are built into the continuous fabric of the work, the result of eight monumental books of madrigal composition. All these styles are exercised with masterful precision for the express purpose of portraying the individual human conflicts in which Nero, Poppea, Octavia, Ottone and Seneca are involved. Although the setting of the Roman court might naturally invite a treatment that focuses upon the pomp and spectacle, Monteverdi almost entirely eschews this aspect, preferring rather to concentrate upon the tension of the human relationships.

A further instance of this emphasis upon the dramatic tension is to be observed in Monteverdi's use of the orchestra in Poppea. Whereas in L'Orfeo he specified a large and varied group of instruments to accompany the pastoral events, in Poppea Monteverdi specifies only strings and continuo (with the probable addition of brass instruments for the coronation scene). Because the orchestra is used comparatively little, dramatic tension tends to be increased when suddenly the orchestra is added to the continuo accompaniment. A fine example of this occurs in the ritornello that opens scene 2 of Act 1. Poppea sings triumphantly of her place in Nero's affections, but she is allowed to sing only one line before the orchestra excitedly rushes in again. Not until the ritornello is completely repeated is the singer allowed to continue, a simple technique used masterfully to sum up Poppea's grasping and ambitious character.

One final touch by Monteverdi must not be left unmentioned. In his libretto, Busenello ended the opera with the splendid and majestic coronation scene. It is most telling of his approach to the work that Monteverdi chose not to let this scene be the final impression left on the minds of his audience. He appended an ecstatic love duet between the triumphant lovers, once more, and finally, directing our attention to the human element in his opera.

Historical Background

by

Rowland Holt Wilson

Nero was the last in the line of descendants of Julius Caesar who ruled the Roman Empire for a hundred years. Britannicus, the Emperor Claudius' son by Messalina, was in truth the rightful heir. However Agrippina, who was Nero's mother, persuaded Claudius to allow his own daughter Octavia to become betrothed to her son. This was a very important move. Not only was she the daughter of the Emperor but, as her name indicated, she was the grand-daughter of Augustus' sister Octavia by both lines of descent. After Claudius' death Agrippina with the help of Seneca was able to stage manage Nero's accession. Needless to say, Britannicus was soon murdered. In fact Nero, who came from a murderous family and was himself murderous, hated violence and only killed when frightened. Unfortunately he became frightened rather easily.

Unlike his predecessors Nero had no interest in military affairs. It was as an actor, singer, poet, charioteer and connoisseur of the arts that he really wanted to shine. In fact Nero, the ruler of the Western world, virtually became a stage professional. He is said to have had a rather thin and nasal voice but would spend hours each day doing vocal exercises while lying on his back with lead weights on his chest. He refused to address the Senate in person for fear of straining his voice and before performances took purges and emetics to ensure the purity of his system. He had a claque numbering 5000 whose cheering made certain that his appearance would be greeted with a proper degree of enthusiasm.

Seneca was one of the most extraordinary men of his own or any other epoch. At the time of his death he was about 65 years old, the most eminent literary figure of his time—public speaker, Stoic philosopher and essayist, tragic dramatist and writer of epigrams. He was immensely fashionable with the young who adored his rhetorical fireworks and the abrupt, restless, pointed mannerisms that made his style the embodiment of the Latin Silver Age.

Nero's sex life even by Roman standards of the day was alarmingly depraved and versatile, and his marriage to Octavio had been a complete failure. He treated her with the utmost contempt and there appeared no prospect of her having a child. When Nero fell in love with Poppea the frame-up of the presumably guiltless Octavia seems to have been inexpressibly sordid. In order to reconcile the Senate, the public and the army to the rejection of a woman of such tremendous birth it was necessary to smear her reputation thoroughly. She was sent into exile and a short time later Poppea arranged to have her murdered.

As for Poppea herself, Tacitus describes her in the following terms. "She had every asset except goodness. From her mother, the loveliest woman of her day, she inherited distinction and beauty. Her wealth too was equal to her birth. She was clever and pleasant to talk to. She seemed respectable. But her life was depraved. To her, married or bachelor bed-fellows were alike. She was indifferent to her reputation—yet insensible to men's love, and herself unloving. Advantage dictated the bestowal of her favours." She died three years after her marriage to Nero when in a fit of rage he kicked her in the stomach when she was pregnant.

The St. Cecilia Orchestra

VIOLIN I
- Norbert Boehm, concertmaster
- Hong Youl Kim
- Ann Pelletier
- Denis Letourneau
- Gisela Untergasser

VIOLIN II
- Mary Clarke
- David Zweifel
- Robert Hryciw
- Allyn Chard

VIOLA I
- Donna Watson
- Susanne Zeindler
- Barbara McLean

VIOLA II
- Marion Whitling
- Elizabeth Morris
- Max Superstein

VIOLONCELLO
- Joanne Ludbrook
- Barbara Morris
- Lise Manchester
- Diana Nuttall

DOUBLE BASS
- James Young

OBOE
- Hiromi Takahashi
- Terry Hart

Continuo Group

HARPSICHORD
- Sandra Erdman
- Teresa Cotton

ORGAN
- Carol Otto

GUITAR
- Peter Higham

VIOLONCELLO
- Lucinda Breed

HARP
- Peggy Bradner

Acknowledgements

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The Citadel Theatre

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